

Dear, Sir or Madam,

I thank the State Government of Victoria for accepting submissions on this important inquiry.

Clearly ecosystems in Victoria are in decline. Reducing biodiversity is an ongoing problem and particularly noticeable and disturbing to those who live in the bush. I live in Hurstbridge, in Nillumbik's Green Wedge Shire. It is a privilege indeed to live in the Green Wedge but things are far from rosy here. Having lived for the past four years under a local, Liberal Party controlled Council, much more interested in promoting development than looking after the environment, I can personally testify to the continuing decline in biodiversity in Nillumbik. I belong to a local lobby group whose aim amongst others, is protection of the Green Wedge. We were recently successful in having a proposed development stopped that would have removed 740 trees from a steep bush block. The Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan is a joke and was produced by a minority group of landowners, known as PALS, who hold the Council in thrall with undue influence. One Cr continued to admin their Facebook page for the first two years of her Council term. The mantra of this group is anti regulation. They claim one should be able to do what one likes on one's own property.

My particular interest is in the flora of the twenty acres of land on which I have lived for 45 years. The decline in orchids and (their symbiotic partners fungi), little bush flowers and herbs is heartbreaking. During the drought the middle story bush disappeared altogether and only some species have reappeared.

Fauna has suffered too. Our watercourse was home to the platypus, tortoises and rakali which have disappeared. Some birds no longer visiting include the scissor grinder, egrets, spoonbills and swamp hens. I am sure other, more observant, watchers could name many more.

Victoria has the highest number of threatened species by subregion in Australia The threats as I perceive them are mainly habitat loss which I believe is the greatest cause of extinctions. Habitat loss is mainly due to inappropriate development. Residential development in the Green Wedge on blocks undersized for the zone is favoured by this Council.

Introduced, invasive pests include rabbits, feral cats and more recently deer which cause a huge amount of damage in the bushland near us and in the Kinglake National Park. Deer eradication programs should be a priority.

Further afield in the high country feral horses remain a problem. I strongly support the culling of feral horses in our precious and vulnerable high country.

Climate change is exacerbating declining ecosystems. Invasive plants are choking our flora. Logging continues to cause extinctions and heightened bushfire danger.

We need stronger environmental laws and enforcement.

As I am running out of time for this submission I will have to stop here.

Thank you,

Colleen Hackett

Sent from my iPad